

PENTECOST AND THE HOLY SPIRIT

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Today is Pentecost, the breath of God and the fire of the Holy Spirit has come down. The church alter hangings are red and most of us remembered to wear our red outfits. And today in our Gospel reading we go back again to before Christ was crucified and we hear another part of His final discourse to the Disciples. He is explaining to them again that He needs to go away and it is to their advantage that He leaves so that the Advocate will come. I'm sure they are probably all standing there staring at each other scratching their heads trying to understand what He is talking about, an Advocate, a Spirit. Christ tells them that He has many more things to say but He knows they couldn't bear it right now so He reassures them the Spirit will come and glorify Him and will take what is His and declare it to them.

We are still confused even in this day and time about the Holy Spirit. We are still trying to understand what it means to have the Holy Spirit living in us. Is the Advocate that Christ talked about guiding us today in our quest to be His Disciples since He has told us He would never leave us?

The Holy Spirit can be one of the difficult theological concepts in the Christian tradition to explain. I heard a joke in school about the Holy Spirit that tried to make it a little lighter. They said when a parishioner asks you to explain what the Holy Spirit is you should give them a serious look and say simply it is a mystery and then get out of the room before anyone can ask a follow up question.

Our Nicene Creed is one of the most ancient of our early Christian documents. We repeat it every Sunday to describe what we believe as Christians. I am going to repeat only the paragraph that reference's the Holy Spirit.

- We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life,
- who proceeds from the Father and the Son,
- who with the Father and the Son is worshiped and glorified,
- who has spoken through the prophets.

When we repeat these words we are asserting that we believe they are true. But do we know what they mean or is the Holy Spirit really just a mystery? Jesus tells us in John 3 that the Spirit blows where it chooses and you hear the sound of it but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes.

The Rev. Barbara Brown Taylor, an Episcopal priest, has described the Holy Spirit this way:

“When Jesus let go of His last breath willingly, we believe, for the love of us that breath hovered in the air in front of Him for a moment and then it was set loose on earth. It was a pungent breath so full of passion, so full of life that it did not simply dissipate as so many breaths do. It grew, in strength and in volume, until it was a mighty wind, which God sent spinning through an upper room in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost. God wanted to make sure that Jesus’ friends were the inheritors of Jesus’ breath, and it worked.”

This isn’t the first time we hear about the breath of God bringing life to the world:

- In the beginning God took dust from the ground and breathed humanity into being.
- In the valley of dry bones in our reading today from Ezekiel we heard about the breath of God returning life to old, dry, brittle bones.
- God’s breath came upon the Blessed Virgin Mary so that the child to be born would be holy and called the Son of God.
- The breath of God gave voice to Jesus’ teaching and preaching of the good news.
- God’s life-giving breath was present at and the source of Jesus’ miracles.
- The breath of God swept through Jesus’ tomb, defeating death, and proclaiming, “He is not here.”

This is this same breath we read about today in Acts 2 that allowed the disciples to speak in languages they had never known before and therefore to be able to spread the message of the Gospels across the world. In Acts, the promised Advocate sets the world on fire and the Church was born.

To us when we think about breath we think of the need for fresh air, and there are even times we feel that we are short of breath but Pentecost tells us it doesn’t have to be that way. The breath of God is not simply a thing or an event. It is the abiding and transforming presence of God’s life with us and in us.

The Holy Spirit has been made public, available to all, men and women, young and old, you and me. No one is left out. The wind of heaven, the breath of God, the Holy Spirit now fills our house, our being and existence. God breathes and we live. God breathes and our lives are put back together. God breathes and we are re-created. The deeds of God’s power are not just words we hear, they are the lives we are to live. They are lives of love and self-giving, forgiveness and reconciliation, generosity and compassion, healing and wholeness, prayer and holiness.¹

Just as the Holy Spirit filled the disciples we are also filled with the Holy Spirit to think in new ways and to move the church in new directions. We are to go out into the world just like the disciples to be witnesses for Christ.

That sounds a little scary when we are told to go out and be witnesses for Christ. Bishop Michael Curry from North Carolina, who is one of the four Bishops who have been selected to be in the election for the next Presiding Bishop in a sermon for Pentecost talked about the examples we are given in the Book of Common Prayer to witness. We should not be unfamiliar

with witnessing since we are clearly told to go out in the next three pages from the Book of Common Prayer.

Page 306 during a Baptism when we are praying for the Candidates the Leader prays “Send them into the world in witness to your love.” We answer “Lord hear our prayer.”

Page 366 in our Post Communion prayer we say “Father, send us out to do the work you have given us to do, to love, and serve you as faithful witnesses of Christ our Lord.

Page 855 in our Catechism under Ministry we are asked what the Laity is and in the first sentence it answers part of that question by saying “The ministry of the lay persons is to represent Christ and His Church; to bear witness to Him wherever they may be.”

We are called just like the Disciples were called in Acts 2 to go out into the world. At Pentecost when they were filled with the Holy Spirit they went out and talked to the crowds in everyone’s own language and declared the wonders of God.

On this day of Pentecost let us feel the Holy Spirit fill us so we can continue the work of Christ’s body in the world. We know we cannot do it by ourselves but we can do all things through Christ with the power of God through the Holy Spirit. Do not be afraid to ask for the filling of the Holy Spirit it is through the Holy Spirit that we can think in new ways and move the Church in new directions.

The Spirit is here with us; let us be open so we can hear His call and we can answer, “Here I am send me.” Where there is injustice we can say, “We will be there.” Where there is a sense of despair, of desperation and of hopelessness we can say, “We will be there.” Where the Gospel needs to be shared we can say, “We will be there.” The times we have to clench our teeth and reach out to someone that we do not want to touch, someone we do not want to pray for is the time when the Spirit is giving us strength. These are all moments when we need to love others as Christ has loved us.

I feel that the Holy Spirit lives in us, supports us, and guides us in all that we do when we live our lives for the Lord and ask the Holy Spirit come and live in us.

Let us pray, Come Holy Spirit, Come!

Amen